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# Time, Heat and Pressure

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Rochester Institute of Technology

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences  
In Candidacy for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Time, Heat, and Pressure

by

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October 5, 2005

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## **Introduction**

The work in my thesis exhibition is the result of a long process of investigation. While creating this body of work I was compelled to challenge my creative process and get to the roots of my personal aesthetic in order to develop the work both formally and conceptually.

Due to my non-traditional background in clay, my work had always been process-driven as opposed to concept-driven. During my time in graduate school, I learned to combine process and content in a way that fully embodies my ideas yet allows me to stay true to my process.

I have always been in awe of the natural, unending beauty of our earth. I am amazed by the sheer force of the elements, and their role in creating and shaping the earth we inhabit. Throughout my long relationship with clay I have gained a strong understanding of ceramic materials, and the forces that come to bear upon it. During the creation of my thesis work I began to notice similarities between the phenomena which form the earth and the phenomena inherent in the creation of ceramic objects. I desired to highlight these similarities by exposing my process of making. My goal was to embrace the phenomena of ceramics as a reflection of natural phenomenon, and balance it with human manipulation of the material. The concept of combining these two elements, as opposed to complete domination of maker over material, which can often be the case in ceramics as well as other media, became the foundation for the artistic and personal growth that occurred during this time.

Over the years I have become an amateur outdoor photographer, taking black and white pictures to remind me of the beauty and wonder I find as I make my way throughout the landscape. Though grounded in and committed to ceramics, I looked to my photos to guide me during the creation of this work. Because of this, I eventually chose to create my thesis work in black and white and in a rectilinear manner, reflecting the photographs

I have taken, as well as photographs I have been inspired by. My photographs represent the beginning of my journey, and the sculpture in my thesis is the result, but by no means the end, of the influence of nature and the importance of process in my ceramic work.

## **Philosophy**

It would be impossible for me to describe my thesis body of work without first explaining a bit about my philosophy of life in general, as this work is a direct extension of it.

Though I grew up in a suburban and city setting, I have spent the past 13 years of my life living in the mountains, learning about the land, and observing the earth and its processes. I have gained an understanding of the earth in a way that I never had before. Out of this understanding has come a love and respect for nature that I might not have known otherwise.

Through this love and respect I feel a strong connection to the earth. I am comfortable and at home in the most remote places, leaving the stresses and concerns of everyday life somewhere far behind me while I absorb and revel in the details of the landscape.

Though I have never climbed the highest peaks, I feel that I have incorporated my appreciation and understanding of the earth into my daily lifestyle. Each day I try to experience the natural world in some fashion, even when forced to be in a city environment, at which point it becomes even more crucial, otherwise I feel an imbalance in my life that is inexplicable. Whether I take a little hike around the park or a trip to the lakeshore it is important that I get outside. In fact, I have even come to appreciate some aspects of city life, finding natural beauty in the most unusual and unexpected places.

David Leveson has summed my views up quite succinctly in a paragraph from his book “A Sense of the Earth”

Much of life these days, it is true, especially life in the cities, is incompatible with the ideal of a real home and meaningful existence. It is life divorced from the canyon, from the earth and from other men. But actually the earth is everywhere, and from it, if only we can sense it, there emanates constantly the wherewithal for man to know what he is and where he belongs. Awareness of the earth, consciousness of its proximity, of its inescapable influence, even when not obvious, presents aesthetic and psychological possibilities largely overlooked or forgotten. Each individual, in canyons or beyond, is deeply affected by his physical surroundings. If it can reach him, knowledge of earth as reality, rock as material of the

universe, landscape as momentary expression of natural process, is a rich and vital source of sanity and calm for modern man.

Thus, it has become crucial for me to not only nurture my connection with the earth, but to share that connection with others, perhaps helping them to see and understand something they may have otherwise overlooked. For example, I believe that many city dwellers are fighting with nature, trying to conquer it, rather than living with it in harmony. When I am out in the woods I try to exist in harmony with the earth and its elements. I understand that the earth has the upper hand, and that I am at the mercy of the natural processes in play. If I ignore this, I will be at a disadvantage. Instead of attempting to conquer or overtake, I must exist in harmony. Aware of my own needs, however, I try to cultivate consciousness of my surroundings and work together with them to find a peaceful middle ground. I have attempted to recreate this mentality when I am not in nature, translating it into a way of existing on a day to day basis. It is my hope to share these ideas of a more holistic way of life, a way that might allow for contemplation and understanding of oneself and the earth in a deeper and, to me, more meaningful existence even within a city environment.

It is this approach that I bring to my ceramic work. The clay is of the earth, and, for me, presents an unparalleled opportunity to become unified with the earth. To walk the land and be amongst its beauty and at its mercy is one thing, but to actually be in dialogue with it is completely another. For me, working in clay represents a dialogue that is not possible in nature. Working in clay is about creating an interaction between me and the material. The more I understand the material and the processes, the more I am able to use them to their fullest potential. I am not interested in conquering clay, making it conform to my needs; I am interested in helping it help me to express my ideas and feelings through crucial discourse.



## On Beauty and Photographs

“Nobody ever discovered ugliness through photographs. But many, through photographs, have discovered beauty. ...what moves people to take photographs is finding something beautiful.”<sup>1</sup>

“Beauty brings copies of itself into being. It makes us draw it, take photographs of it, or describe it to other people. Sometimes it gives rise to exact replications and other times to resemblances and still other times to things whose connection to the original site of inspiration is unrecognizable.”<sup>2</sup>

I believe my aesthetic was born during my time spent in the landscape of the Northeast. I found, and continue to find, everything in nature beautiful, no matter the season. As Emerson so eloquently put it, “To the attentive eye, each moment of the year has its own beauty. It beholds every hour a picture which was never seen before and which shall never be seen again.”

I enjoy a feeling of intimacy with the landscape and the feeling of being grounded to a place. I always love the quiet that I find in nature, the time for contemplation. I have also gained a sense of perspective. No matter what chaos exists in the civilized world, the natural world is completely unaffected by it. Nature perseveres. Perhaps it brings me a sense of security in changing times. Wars rage, yet the leaves always fall in autumn, the snow always comes in winter, and the flowers always bloom in the spring.

In my earliest years of awakening to the beauty of the earth I became drawn to images that would remind me of these wonders, images that would help me recreate the feelings of nature when I was not able to experience the landscape in all its grandeur. Over the years I started to view the natural world with more of an artist's eye, and began to notice the tiniest of the details in the landscape. For example, the patterns of growth of a

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<sup>1</sup> Sontag, Susan: “On Photography”; 1977; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York; p. 85

<sup>2</sup> Scarry, Elaine: “On Beauty and Being Just”; 1999; Princeton University Press; p. 3

mushroom and how it attaches to the tree, or the ripples in the snow as it was blown by the wind and now sparkles quietly in the sunlight. I wanted desperately to take these small wonders of the world with me, to have something to remind me every day. At first, taking pictures was my way to take home a bit of what I saw out there, my way to remember, and, basically, to document. Over the years, however, I began to develop my eye. Slowly, my photos became more about interpretation, less about documentation. Though I started out in color, I now photograph only in black and white, as I believe it is more poetic, and allows for greater abstraction.

I was awestruck to discover the work of Ansel Adams and Edward Weston. I immediately felt a connection to both as they seem to share my appreciation for nature and the beautiful forms, lines and patterns found within. We seemed to hold the same definitions of beauty. I strove to incorporate their quiet, contemplative way of interpretation into my own photographs, using their artistic vision to help me sharpen my own.

To me, beauty is quiet and simple. It does not shout “I am beautiful!” It waits for you to find it. It allows space, and room for contemplation. It is poetic and unassuming. These are the feelings I extract from the natural world, and they are the ideals I strive to incorporate into my ceramic work. I want to leave room for the viewer to breathe, to incorporate their own ideas of beauty, and to interpret the work as they feel necessary. It is not my goal to impose a set of ideas upon the viewer. My ideals and ideas are there for the taking, but they will not beat one over the head in order to be recognized.

Since I have been taking pictures solely in black and white for many years, I desired to bring the poetic nature of black and white film to the clay. Thus, it seemed only fitting to use a black and white color palette for my thesis work. To further reflect the photograph, I decided to make the forms rectilinear.

Photography, like ceramics, is a process oriented art. I found many similarities between the two as I worked through my thesis. Using the thick porcelain together with the

melting clay I eventually developed, and exploring their interaction with the heat of the kiln, I felt as if the finished, fired pieces served as photographs of what was taking place in the kiln during firing, and at the time the kiln was shut off. The cracking and melting of the respective clays gave “photographic” evidence of the processes they went through as they expanded and shrunk as a result of the heat: the melter bubbled and oozed, showing its path and how far it was allowed to progress before being halted in its passage, while the porcelain split apart and cracked as it shifted.

The photographs included in the exhibition are the most recent embodiment of some of the ideas that began to germinate a long time ago. Their inclusion is important as they represent the beginning of my appreciation for the beauty of the earth, and are the thread that has continued to inspire me throughout my growth as a ceramic artist. I will always use photography as a means for remembrance, glorification and interpretation of the ephemeral beauty of nature that I would otherwise be unable to take home with me.



## **Process and the Emergence of Content**

I had for a long time been concerned about what I believed to be a lack of content in my ceramic sculpture. However, whenever I attempted to create in a completely content driven way my work stagnated. Heavy emphasis on content interrupted my process, resulting in frustration and work that was, to me, incomplete. While trying to work through this, I realized that the process of making was in fact a large component in my work with clay. It was always the process of ceramics, as well as its connection to the earth, that drew me to the material. In order to incorporate content into my work I needed to recognize the important role process played.

The strongest elements of process in ceramics are the changes that naturally take place in the clay as it journeys from raw material to finished product. It goes through several stages on its own as it transitions from wet to dry, only to endure even more transformation in the kiln throughout the firing as the heat intensifies and the clay reaches its maturing point. During these changes it naturally expands and shrinks, sometimes cracking, sometimes bubbling, chipping apart, or even exploding. Time, heat, and pressure all play a roll in how much or how little these “flaws” can be controlled or manipulated. For example, the longer something takes to dry, the less cracking will occur; if something gets too hot in the kiln it will bubble, or possibly melt; if it gets too hot too fast it will explode; if you exert too little pressure during its formation it will fall apart. Clay can be finicky. It must be treated with absolute care throughout the whole process, or what most people call flaws in the material will be visible: you will see the air bubble, the crack, the chip. I do not see these as flaws or imperfections. In the same way I find nature beautiful with all its flaws, I see these ceramic imperfections as beautiful, naturally occurring byproducts of the material and the processes.

I found many similarities between the natural processes in ceramics and the natural processes of the earth: both get heated and cooled, expanding, shrinking, cracking, bubbling, and melting in the process. Everywhere you look, the landscape is the result of



the effects of time, heat, and pressure upon it. Melting, oozing lava hardens into rock, which over time sprouts new life; rock formations that have been slowly pushed upon each other form folds and ledges, leaving the layers of thousands of years visible; mountains themselves are the result of pressure and erosion over time, lakes the result of melting glaciers. I wanted to reflect these grand transformations of the earth in my work.

I am also in awe of the contrasts that exist side by side in nature: squishy moss growing on a hard rock; soft white snow on a hard brown tree. In order to reflect this, I decided to have two completely different materials to work with: one hard, and one soft.

As I worked with the materials, the physical properties of the two clays together began to represent more than just the contradictions present in nature, they began to exemplify the emotional and spiritual way that humans exist in the world. Like nature, people, too, have contradictions within themselves, and we are all affected by the properties of nature. Time, heat, and pressure take their toll on us. While I strongly desired to exploit the processes of the clay, thereby replicating the processes of the earth, I also wanted to expose these processes to represent their effect on people, and in so doing create beautiful objects that would reflect the natural elements they were drawn from, bringing the viewer back to that place of quiet contemplation where it all began.

I strongly believe there should always be a balance between the voice of the maker and the voice of the material, allowing each enough space to have their say. I began to see that I could use the unique process of ceramics and the phenomena generated by the material and the kiln to help me achieve my goals in an effective manner. Once this became clear, I set out to push the idea of balance between maker and material in the direction that would help me integrate my concepts. Only through experimentation did I come to understand how much I could or could not manipulate the materials to achieve the look I wanted. If I did too much or too little it would upset the balance I was striving so hard to attain, often ending in disaster.

I was able to reconcile my process vs. content problem by integrating my process into my content. The two are intertwined, and one does not exist without the other. For me, without balance between my hand and the “hand” of the material, there was no way for the content to exist, no way for the clay to play its role, too. The idea of balance and dialogue with the material enabled me to use the entire ceramic process as a means for expression; not just the clay, but the ingredients in the clay, the firing, and the speed at which I made as well, thus instilling a holistic approach throughout my entire process of making

“The physical relationship with work is as important as the piece, the path taken is as important as the “objective.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Koie, Ryoji; from “Ceramics Today”; Editor: Suzanne Dell’Ara; #6, June 1984

## Choice of Material

Porcelain has long been revered as the most beautiful clay in the world. Because of its qualities, the history of porcelain is steeped in tradition mostly in the realm of pottery. In more recent times, however, there have been more and more ceramic artists turning to porcelain for their sculptural work. “Most of the constructional methods employed in working other clays can be adapted, with care and certain modifications in handling and approach, to hand-building in porcelain.”<sup>4</sup> However, it usually proves to be a difficult task, attempted by only a few, as those properties that make it desirable also make it difficult to work with. “The nature of porcelain as a material seems to suit the perfectionist approach. Many of the potters who work with porcelain do so with an exactness which is part of their natural make up.”<sup>5</sup>

I chose to work in porcelain not because of its history, but because it is the purest, most elegant, and strongest of all ceramic materials. Because it requires much care to work with, it enables the highest potential for the crucial dialogue I was seeking. It has its own rules, and if I was careful, I found I could break them, but only within reason. I decided to abandon the traditional uses for porcelain, something that perhaps most people would balk at. “Fashioning porcelain *roughly* with conscious disregard for its properties and character goes beyond the desecration of tradition, and is almost certain to be a pointless exercise.”<sup>6</sup> However, I did not believe I was disregarding porcelain’s properties. On the contrary, I was extremely conscious of its properties, and was curious to see what would happen when the envelope was pushed and the precious laws of porcelain were broken.

Simply put, porcelain presented the most challenge to work with and therefore the greatest reward.

I found a way to color the porcelain black. I was also able to develop a white clay body that would melt at cone 6 with relative predictability. I colored that black as well, and

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<sup>4</sup> Lane, Peter; *Studio Porcelain*; Chilton Book Company, Radnor, PA; 1980; p.25

<sup>5</sup> Lane, Peter; *Studio Porcelain*; Chilton Book Company, Radnor, PA; 1980; p.26

<sup>6</sup> Lane, Peter; *Studio Porcelain*; Chilton Book Company, Radnor, PA; 1980; p.26



thus had four clays to work with. White and black melting clay, and white and black porcelain.

The porcelain and its lusciousness created potential for the most contrast with the melting clay I had devised. As I continued to test the two clays together, I found that the melter would bubble and ooze, while the thick slabs of porcelain would crack, sometimes to the point of splitting apart. The dichotomy between the two was unbelievably beautiful and profound to me. They are similar, though, in that both are relatively unpredictable. I knew the porcelain would crack and the melter would ooze, but I was never sure how much or where. Great care was taken to control this, but it didn't always work. This was both frustrating and exciting, as it is this part of the dialogue that most interests me, this is what I had been trying to achieve, a physical embodiment of this uncertainty that is life.

What I found, however, is that with practice I could control the cracking and oozing to a certain extent. In order to do this, however, it was important to devise parameters within which to remain. The porcelain could only be so thick, I could only use so much melter, it could only reach a certain temperature, and the kiln could only be fired at a certain rate of speed. Disasters were not easily averted. However, in discovering these parameters I began to know and understand my materials better, perhaps in the same way, through dialogue, one comes to know and understand people better. I learned I could play around with the amount of control I exerted, placing pieces in different places in the kiln to achieve more or less cracking and melting. I came to rely on this controlled spontaneity to work in a way that was both beautiful, and expressive, allowing both my voice and the voice of the material to be heard equally. This was exactly what I had been hoping for in my quest for a dialogue with my materials.

Eva Zeisel seems to understand exactly what I was going through. I can identify with her ideas about making, her experiences with the process of ceramics, and her grasp on the conflict between spontaneity and control. What is most profound, however, is her understanding of a deeper meaning attainable through the relationship between maker

and material. She explains it beautifully in her book *Eva Zeisel on Design; The Magic Language of Things*:

The delight in making, the pleasure in the act of creating, is a part of every art. This pleasure, this enjoyment of the process, it is most noticeable in those arts in which the maker is most directly connected with the end product. Thus, for the potter, the process involves the intimate pleasure of squeezing and caressing the soft, cool clay.

The next step, the control and articulation of line and surface, does not provide the same degree of sensuous, indulgent, physical pleasure. It calls, instead, for a disciplined articulation in the vital dialogue between the maker and the object. It is a process of give and take, of the clear formulation and control of the sweep of the line, the modulation of shade, the disposition of mass. It is the step that brings the object from the sphere of purely sensuous pleasure, provided by direct contact with the material, into a spiritual sphere.

Zeisel understood that it isn't enough to simply rely on the spontaneity of the ceramic process for it doesn't always succeed. As I came to understand, there is a balance that must be achieved between control and phenomenon in order for a piece to be successful. The creation of beautiful objects was important to me, and it was thus crucial to strive to achieve this balance.

## Proportions

After settling on the color palette and shape I chose to use the proportions of the Golden Rectangle and the numbers of the Fibonacci sequence. These represent the proportions of growth in nature, and are noted throughout history to be the most harmonious and pleasing to the eye.

In his book *The Power of Limits*, Gyorgy Doczi describes the Golden Rectangle as “a uniquely reciprocal relationship between two unequal parts of a whole, in which the small part stands in the same proportion to the large part as the large part stands to the whole.”<sup>7</sup> This proportion is 1: .618 and is represented by the Fibonacci series of numbers which indicates the progression of new growth. The Nautilus shell is the most recognized example of the Fibonacci sequence. As the shell grows, each new section, although larger, is in the same proportions to the one before.

I felt it was more than appropriate to base my measurements upon this principle, given that the premise of my thesis work is rooted in my connection to the earth and its natural elements. Using the Golden Rectangle and Fibonacci series further strengthened the relationship between my work and the natural processes of earth, for not only is clay directly derived from the earth’s surface, but I was now also able to imitate the natural growth patterns visible in every flower and plant.

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<sup>7</sup> Doczi, Gyorgy: “The Power of Limits: Proportional Harmonies in Nature, Art, and Architecture”; 1994; Shambhala Press; p.3



## **The Bigger Picture**

Throughout the development of my thesis work, I researched other artists who use the idea of process as concept as well, and there are many, especially in ceramics. My first inspiration to consciously manipulate the raw materials in my clay body came from Jennifer Lee. She is an English potter who adds soluble metallic salts to her clay to achieve striations of color in her pots. The result is a very natural, quiet beauty. The pieces are meticulously crafted, and showcase her undeniable mastery of the materials she has chosen. The vessels look as if they were plucked from a rock wall. Her reliance upon nature as an inspiration is unquestionable. The marriage of her touch with the properties of the material is breathtaking.

Anybody working with atmospheric firing also fell under the category of using process as content, especially those who use the forces of nature, such as time and gravity. Jun Kaneko is one whom I looked to extensively for inspiration. His work has a strong presence resulting from clear understanding of his materials and process. He frequently uses the unpredictability of gravity in the kiln to enhance his huge forms. The ensuing spontaneity is quite moving, and when looking at the runs in his glazes, one gets the sense that Kaneko is slowing down or stopping time, and to me that is especially profound.

I searched outside the realm of ceramics as well, in order to find a place for myself amongst my fellow artists. Aside from the photographers Ansel Adams and Edward Weston, I found a direct connection with some of the abstract expressionists such as Jackson Pollock whose paintings are a direct result of his process. His work is very physical, with the splashes of paint directly connected to his movements. The dialogue between himself, his paint, and his canvas is plain to see. I like to imagine Pollock engaging with his work similarly to the way I engage with mine: physically working the materials, looking and listening to what the work is saying, and then reacting to what is heard or felt. For me the cycle repeats over and over until a piece is finished, and, simply in looking at the work, I imagine it was the same for Pollock.

I feel an association with Eva Hesse as well. As a sculptor, she is obsessed with her materials, often creating layer upon layer upon layer to achieve the desired results. She seems to get lost in the process of making, letting the materials speak through her. Though we differ in that I believe her process of creating is more important than its outcome, I am able to relate to her understanding and passion regarding her often compulsive act of creating.

I also feel a deep, direct kinship to the Earth artists such as Andy Goldsworthy, as I believe we share a similar attitude towards the earth. Creating art with the actual materials that make up our earth, Goldsworthy lets the process of nature take its toll on his pieces, then photographs them to document the progression of deterioration. He has achieved the balance between his hand and his materials that I strive for, exerting his influence on the materials, be they leaves, rocks, wood or ice, and then letting nature take over. In most cases the pieces deteriorate, but what I find important is the dialogue he has created. He takes the materials at hand, creates something completely unexpected, and then lets the process of nature have its way. Goldsworthy "...does not contrive functional objects, but objects embodying the mere pleasure of making them-and a sympathetic kind of making at that: creating in harmony with nature."<sup>8</sup> I also feel a connection to Goldsworthy because of his use of the photograph to document his work. The only way we are able to see most of his work is through the photograph, and his use of it as not only documentation, but as a conduit for the viewer, is important to me.

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<sup>8</sup> Stefan Beyst; June 2002; [www.e-sites.net/english/goldsworthy.htm](http://www.e-sites.net/english/goldsworthy.htm)



## Body of Work

My thesis body of work consists of five ceramic pieces, supplemented by twelve small 2x3 inch photographs. I displayed them in the gallery so that there would be a progression as one walked through the pieces, and enough space in between them for the viewer to focus on the piece they were looking at, without distraction.

The first piece is entitled *Four Ways of Being*. It is a wall piece consisting of four large slabs of black porcelain. Each slab is two feet long by one and a half feet tall and two inches deep. On top of each slab sits a rectangle of melting clay encased in a thin sheet of porcelain slip. The melting clay oozes out of its slip encasement in progressing intensity along the four slabs, with the first oozing just a bit, and the last quite a lot. The first of the four slabs has a rectangle of white melting clay encased in white slip. The melter has just started to emerge from its boundaries. The second slab has a rectangle of white melting clay encased in black slip, with the melting clay starting to ooze a bit more. The third slab has a rectangle of black melting clay encased in white slip. The properties of the black melting clay enable it to melt at a lower temperature than the white, and as a result the melting is more extreme, though not out of control, and is further progressed than the first two slabs. The fourth and final slab in the piece has a rectangle of black melting clay encased in black slip. This one is melting the most, almost as if creating a puddle, to the point of greatly distorting the rectangular porcelain slip shell which used to encase it. While the first three slip encasings hold their shape, the fourth is no longer rectilinear, though the outline is still discernable.

I believe that this is the most successful of the pieces. It shows clearly the parameters set for the phenomena to occur. The thickness of the slabs was just enough to allow them to crack without splitting into pieces, there was just enough melter in each rectangle, fired to the right temperatures to enable the phenomena of melting to occur within reason. The composition of the alternating black and white slip encased melter is simple at first glance, but upon contemplation the pieces begin to reveal the delicate nature of the

material and process. It is not obvious how they are created, and therefore instill a sense of mystery and curiosity in the viewer.

To me this piece is about people's different ways of existing in the world. The black slab is a constant throughout the piece, and they each have a melter encased in slip, representing the basic building blocks that exist in all of us. However, the exterior shell is different in each one, and encases something different in each one. Like people, each piece has reacted differently to the same conditions. Each slab has cracked in a different way, and each melting rectangle is different. While some have only melted a little showing a strong exterior shell keeping the mushy insides in, some have melted a lot, showing a weak exterior shell allowing the mushy insides to spill out for all to see.

The second piece is entitled *Couple* and consists of two rectangular columns, each roughly four feet tall by eighteen inches by thirteen inches. They are made of white porcelain, with rectangular "windows" of melter inlayed on the face of each. On one of the towers the rectangles are large, each roughly five inches long by one inch wide, arranged in an alternating pattern from top to bottom of the piece. On the other column, the rectangles are smaller, five inches long by one half inch wide, arranged in a similar pattern as the first. On each column the melting clay drips from one rectangle into the next, allowing the viewer to experience the gravity and its effect on the clay. The porcelain of the columns has cracked immensely, though the pieces remain intact. The combination of the dripping clay which looks still wet, running down over the hard, cracking porcelain creates subtle, yet strong, contrast in each of the columns.

I decided to make columns in order to use gravity to its full effect. I felt that when fired vertically, the running and dripping of the melting clay would be an effective contrast to the hard porcelain. In *Four Ways of Being* the melter has not shown the effect of gravity as much, as it has simply pooled upon the surface of the slabs. I believe that *Couple* represents people not only because of their scale, but because they compliment and complete each other. One column would not be as strong on its own as the two are together. The use of the melting clay in similar yet different ways on each of the pieces

is addressing the complimentary nature that couples often find themselves in. They often are made of the same things, but it comes out in different ways. These differences are often complimentary, and where two people seem different on their own, together they are complete.

The third piece is entitled *Synonymous*. It is comprised of two rectangular towers of white porcelain, each twenty one inches tall by eight inches by five inches. There is a line around each that has been carved out and inlayed with white melting clay. On one of the towers the line is carved in the top third of the tower, the other on the bottom third. The melting clay has dripped down in an uneven fashion all around where it was applied, providing rhythmic undulations of oozing white clay. The porcelain has cracked unpredictably.

This piece also represents people, though the scale is significantly smaller than that of *Couple*. However, like the columns of *Couple*, the pieces of *Synonymous*, too, would be out of place if each were to stand alone. Also, the application of the melter in the same way in both columns but in different places again represents the similarities and differences of people at the same time.

The fourth piece is called *Solitaire*, and consists of a single rectangular wall piece similar to those in *Four Ways of Being*. It measures two feet by one and a half feet by two inches but is instead made of white porcelain. It has a rectangle of black melting clay on top encased in white slip. The black melter has completely escaped from its home of slip to ooze and puddle over roughly two thirds of the slab. The texture of the melter is that of craters, and contrasts beautifully with the smooth, white cracked porcelain slab.

*Meridian*, the fifth piece is made up of many small two by three inch rectangles of layered black and white porcelain paper clay that run the length of the eight foot wall. On the top layer of each rectangle is a line of melted copper. The pieces are displayed so that the line of copper, while in a different place on each rectangle, remains continuous and straight, causing the rectangles to be offset. The pieces themselves are, like some



people, extremely fragile. The copper is placed in different places on each rectangle, some higher, some lower, some right in the middle, and has melted differently on each one. Some has melted a lot, some a little, and some has even seeped in between the layers of the clay. Regardless of the amount of melting that has taken place, the line of copper is still recognizable and from afar one can see the line run straight and level across the wall.

The dictionary defines a meridian as “an imaginary great circle on the earth’s surface passing through the North and South geographic poles. All points on the same meridian have the same longitude.” Also, “A great circle passing through the two poles of the celestial sphere and the zenith of a given observer.” And lastly, “Any of the longitudinal lines or pathways on the body along which acupuncture points are distributed.”<sup>9</sup> This piece represents the line of humanity that runs through us all, though in different ways.

There are 12 black and white photographs in 5x7 glass frames with no borders. The size of the actual visible photograph is about 2x3 inches to match the size of the tiles in Meridian and to keep with the proportions of the golden rectangle.

The photos are black and white detail shots of plant life and the beach. They are displayed off to the side of the ceramic work so as not to interrupt the flow of the main body of work. This was important, because it is how I see the photos in general; an important influence of the work, but not central to it. Rather, it completes my circle of making, and perhaps can allow others to make connections between nature, the photographs, and my resulting ceramic work.

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<sup>9</sup> Dictionary.com

## **Conclusion**

The preparation for this body of work has been a lifelong journey. My learned ability to understand the earth has enabled me to be open to understanding the materials and processes of ceramics. One of the most important aspects in the development of my thesis work was my struggle to identify my definition of beauty, and reconcile my process of creating with the content of the work. The processes inherent in ceramics, as well as its direct connection with the earth, are what drew me to work with clay in the first place, and, in the end, what will continue to fuel my interest in ceramics. However, throughout the development of my thesis my ability to let go of preconceptions about controlling the material and placing meaning on art created necessary space for the important dialogue between maker and material to emerge. In the same way that I have come to understand the earth and its ways, I came to understand my materials and their ways, and create a harmonious, holistic way of working with clay.

Art and life do not exist apart from each other. Merging my philosophy of life into my process of working with clay was, for me, a successful venture. Embracing this idea allowed me to use my abilities and the ceramic material to its fullest potential, and will influence my work in clay for years to come.





Overall left





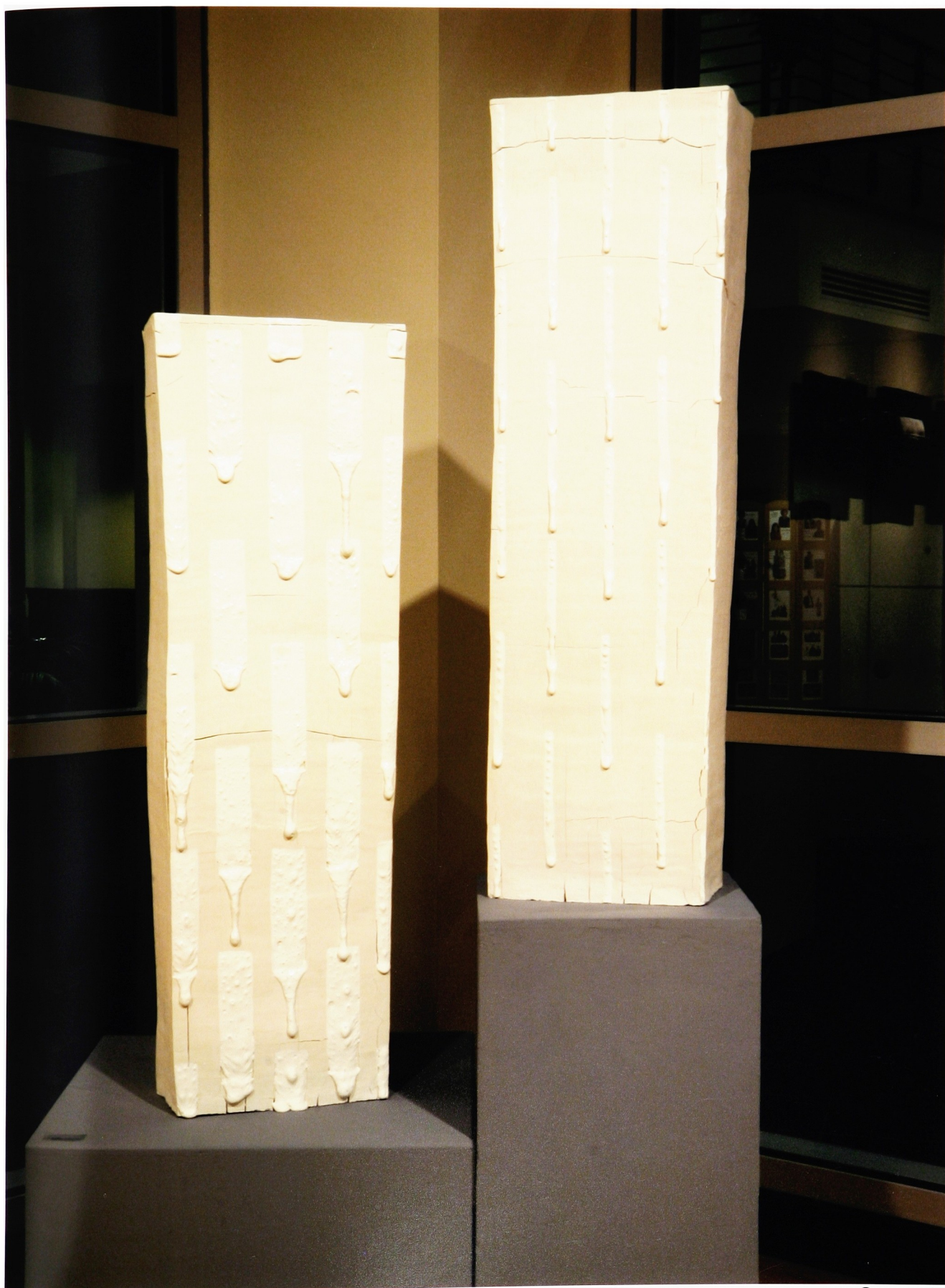
Overall right





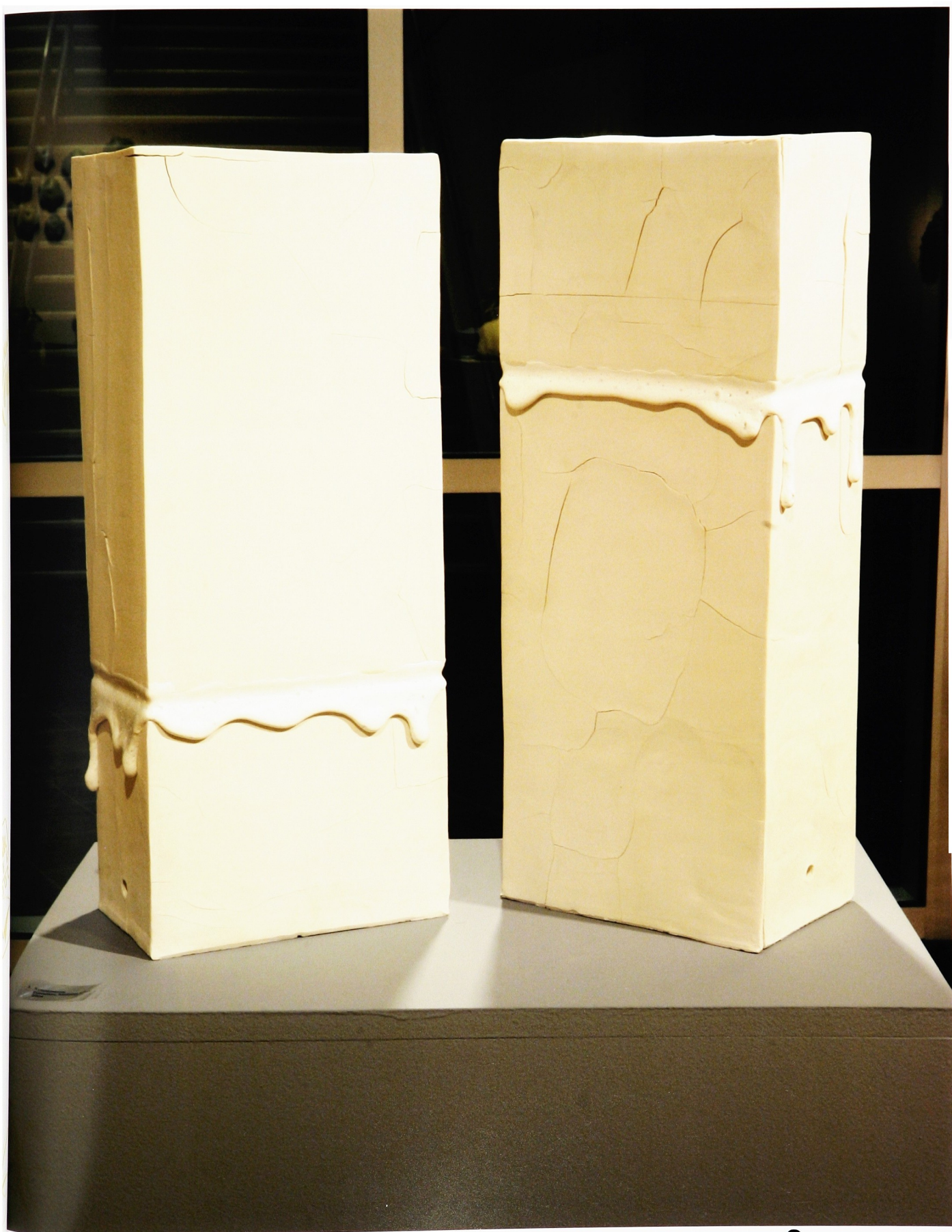
Four ways of being





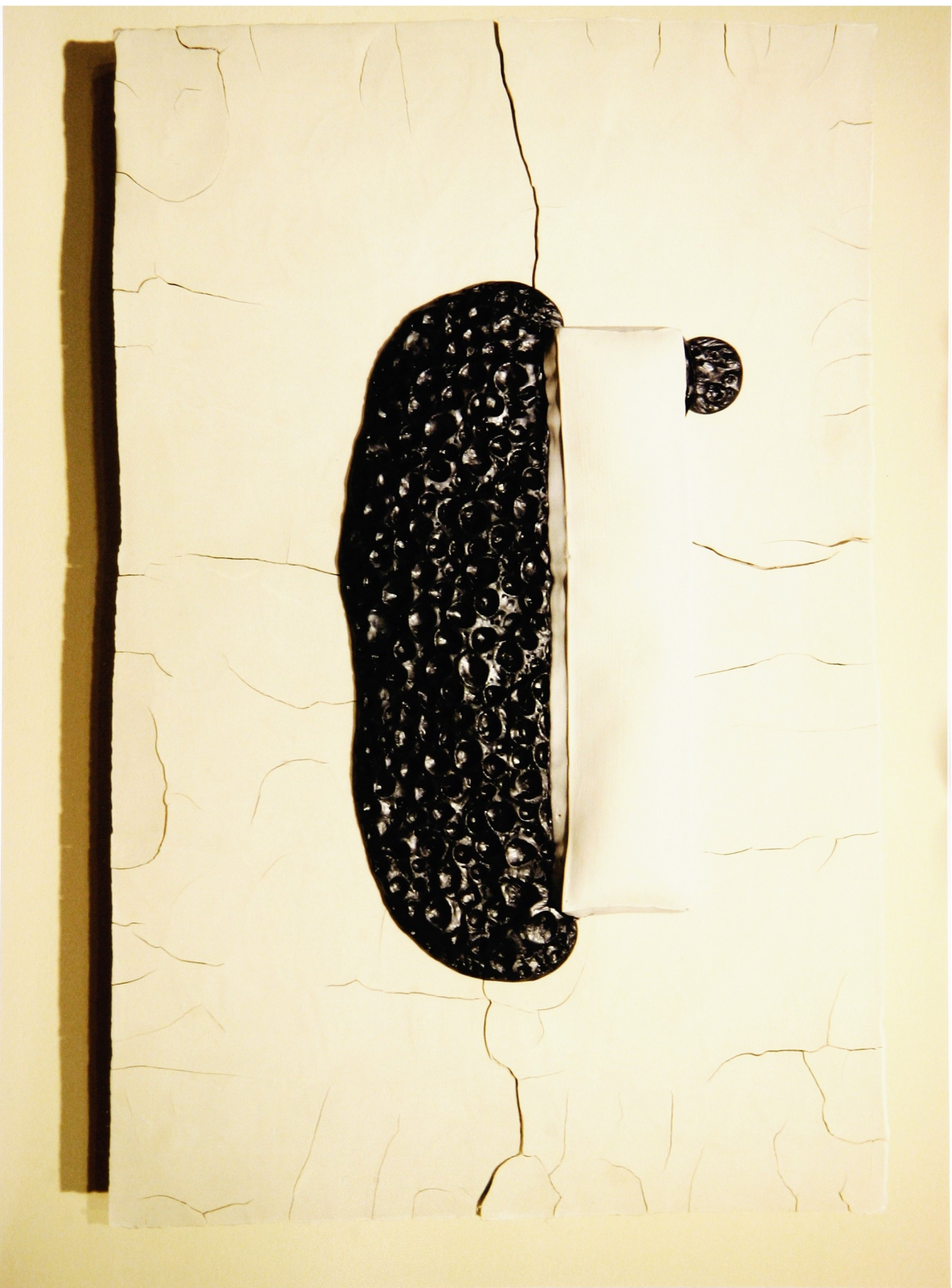
Couple





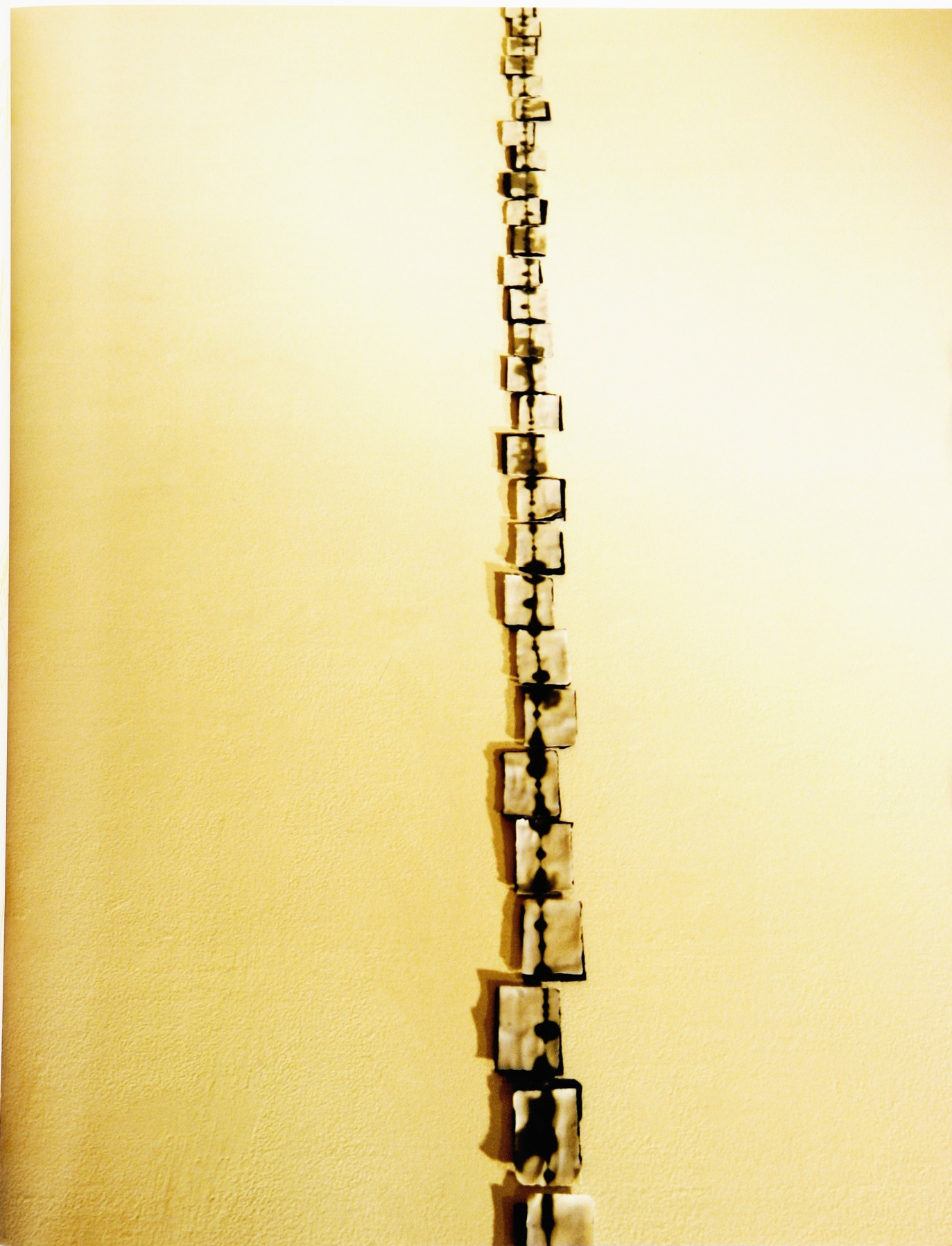
Synonymous



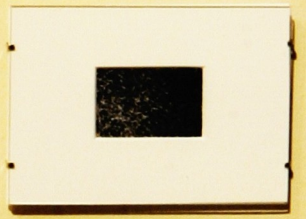


Solitaire











TABBATHA HENRY  
OVERALL THESIS

↑

©



SHOW - LEFT

TABBATHA HENRY  
OVERALL THESIS

↑

©



SHOW - RIGHT

2004

TABBATHA HENRY  
"FOUL WAYS OF BEING"

↑

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PORCELAIN, MELTING

2004

TABBATHA HENRY  
"COUPLE"

↑

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PORCELAIN, MELTING  
CLAY 2004

TABBATHA HENRY  
"SYNCHRONOUS"

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PORCELAIN, MELTING  
CLAY 2004

TABBATHA HENRY  
"SOLITAIRE"

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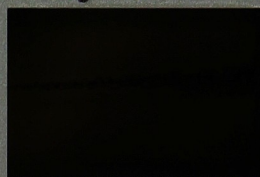


PORCELAIN, MELTING

TABBATHA HENRY  
"MERIDIAN"

↑

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PORCELAIN, COPPER

TABBATHA HENRY  
PHOTOS

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